

Cheesman Road Bridge
Spanning the Pine River
In Section 25 in Pine River Township
and the city of Saint Louis
Gratiot County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-21

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
Mid-Atlantic Region
National Park Service
U. S. Department of the Interior
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Cheesman Road Bridge

HAER No. MI-21

Location: Spanning the Pine River, in Section 25 of Pine River Township and the City of Saint Louis, Gratiot County, Michigan

UTM: 16.692899.4807817
Quad: Saint Louis

Date of Construction: 1886; altered in 1955

Builder: Smith Bridge Company of Toledo, Ohio

Present Owner: Gratiot County Road Commission
920 E. Center Street
Ithaca, Michigan 48847

Present Use: Vehicular bridge

Significance: The Cheesman Road Bridge is significant because it is one of the few wrought-iron pin-connected, Pratt truss highway bridges surviving in Michigan. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.

Project Information: This documentation was undertaken in April 1987 in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement by the Gratiot County Road Commission as a mitigative measure prior to the demolition of the bridge.

Compiler: Fred Walkington
Manager
Gratiot County Road Commission
Ithaca, Michigan

Michigan Avenue, in the city of Saint Louis, intersects Cheesman Road, approximately 240 feet east of the bridge. Begole Road intersects Cheesman Road approximately 1.8 miles west of the bridge. Cheesman Road, running east to west, is the principal road crossing the Pine River and running between the twin cities of Saint Louis and Alma. The Cheesman Road Bridge not only provides access for the residents of Saint Louis and Alma, it is also used by farmers on both sides of the river for access to markets. The bridge is typical of the many "farm to market" bridges built during the late 1800s and early 1900s in the rural areas of Michigan.

The original plans for the bridge were destroyed. The bridge's nameplate indicates the bridge was constructed by the Smith Bridge Company of Toledo, Ohio, in 1886.

The Cheesman Road Bridge is a two span, seven panel structure. Its main span (west) is a wrought iron Pratt through truss, with a total length of 91 feet. The truss members are pin connected. The original deck consisted of wood planks. In 1955, a new corrugated steel deck was installed, overlain with a bituminous surface. A single angle lattice-type rail runs inside each truss and is attached to the vertical truss members.

A short steel stringer bridge is located to its east. Thirty-two feet long, it has a corrugated steel deck overlain with a bituminous-wearing surface. The pier between the truss and approach span is constructed of steel H members and the abutments are constructed of concrete.

The Cheesman Road Bridge is 123 feet in length, 14 feet in width. Its clear width is 13.5 feet. A four-foot sidewalk is located on the north side of the bridge.

The Cheesman Road Bridge is typical of most bridges built in southern Michigan around the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Because the truss superstructure was relatively lightweight, it was fabricated at a steel fabrication plant and shipped by rail to the job site. The contractor constructed the substructure units and then assembled and erected the steel truss. The bridge was designed to allow motorized farm vehicles access to markets. As motorized vehicles became bigger, it was necessary in 1955 to strengthen the bridge by installing a new steel deck.